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Travel Montana UPDATE

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Montana's 1997 Visitation Up 2%; More Growth Predicted In 1998

As you get ready for the 24th Annual Governor's Conference on Tourism and Recreation in Kalispell, April 6-7, here are some highlights from Montana's 1997 tourism year to pack in your "data bag." This information was prepared by the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR) at UM.

- 8.8 million Montana visitors in 1997, up 2% from 1996.
- Montana's visitors spent $1.4 billion during their 1997 stay, generating a $3 billion economic benefit for the state.
- Montana's tourism industry annual payroll is now over $858 million.
- 59,000 Montana jobs are directly or indirectly supported by tourism.
- Canada to Montana border crossings were up 2%
- Statewide air passenger traffic was up almost 4%
- Skier visits increased 4%
- Visits to Glacier and Yellowstone parks were down, 1% and 3%, respectively.

For 1998, ITRR predicts continued growth in visitation and Canadian traffic, a 2% increase for both. Montana's air traffic should increase 3% and skier days should remain stable. ITRR Executive Director Norma Nickerson will present more Montana travel industry data during her Trends, Surveys and Forecast session Monday morning at the Governor's Conference.

Cultural Tourism: A Montana Discussion

Over the last year, a group of Montanans have been gathering to talk about the concept of cultural tourism: travel or visitation directed toward experiencing the arts, heritage and lifeways unique to a place or a group of people. This discussion was spawned by a regional forum held in Denver last April which presented cultural tourism as a major travel trend. Representatives from Montana's local and state art groups, historical organizations and the humanities, museums, tribal entities, tourism businesses, and regional and state tourism developers have been involved in the discussion.

Travel Montana's Cultural Tourism Specialist Shari Nault-Pullar says the concept offers a number of benefits. Its development provides opportunities for collaboration between the arts, historical, humanities and cultural organizations and the tourism industry. If developed correctly— which means being authentic, says Shari— cultural tourism can both preserve the integrity of a community's cultural resources while creating a sustainable tourism component.

Cultural tourism and the Montana discussion about it is on the Governor's Conference Monday afternoon agenda. Connecticut Humanities Council Executive Director Bruce Fraser will talk about his state's experience developing a cultural tourism program. Following this presentation, conference participants are invited to join Fraser and members of the Montana discussion group for a roundtable discussion about cultural tourism and how Montana can capitalize on this growing travel market.

Looking At Montana's "Bed Tax" Future

"Any good organization needs to step back every now and then to look at how it is operating and how it can improve;" that is the perspective Travel Montana Director Matthew Cohn has on the work of a committee being formed by the Tourism Advisory Council (TAC) to look at the current use of Montana's "bed tax" and to identify its best future use. The committee, whose membership will be selected in early April, will include TAC members along with representatives from local and state government, and Montana's Indian and business community. The committee will present its findings to the October TAC meeting. There will be more information on this review in future newsletters.

The state's "bed tax" is also a discussion topic at the Governor's Conference. On Tuesday morning, State Senator John Harp, lobbyist Stuart Doggett and Lee Newspaper Capitol Bureau Chief Chuck Johnson will provide their perspectives on Montana politics and the future of the state's "bed tax."

Lt. Governor Presents TIIP Money In Red Lodge

Lt. Governor Judy Martz presented Carbon County Historical Society representatives with $44,026 in state "bed tax" funds during ceremonies in Red Lodge, March 14. The funds are a grant from Travel Montana's Tourism Infrastructure Investment Program (TIIP). The grant will help finance the renovation of the historical Labor Temple building in downtown Red Lodge which will house the society's new "Peaks to Plains" Museum.

The "Peaks to Plains" Museum

The "Peaks to Plains" Museum will provide more than 20,000 square feet of space for displays and activities. The Carbon County Historical Society's current log cabin facilities allow only half of their collection to be viewed by the public. The Carbon County grant was one of five awarded to tourism-related projects around Montana during the 1997 grant cycle. The other 1997 TIIP-funded projects are in Seeley Lake, Fort Benton, ZooMontana in Billings and Choteau.

Since the TIIP program began in 1995, about $868,000 in "bed tax" funds have been invested into fifteen tourism-related infrastructure projects in 13 Montana communities.

Winter Media Montana Visits

While Montana's 1997/98 winter season has been relatively casual in the weather department, it has been an active one for media visits. The regions and CVBs with winter recreation activities have been busy helping print and broadcast media get good Montana material to share with their audiences. Here are just some of the media Travel Montana's publicity program has worked with this winter:

TV: "SnowTrax TV" (TSN-Canada, Outdoor Life Network OLN-US) shot two snowmobile programs in West Yellowstone area.

"Snow Adventures" (OLN, ESPN2) shot Montana skiing, snowmobiling, and winter fishing for their program series.

"Great Sports Vacations" (Fox Sports, Travel Channel, OLN) shot a snowmobile adventure program in the Pioneer Mountains.

Print: Washington AAA publication writer and family did a train trip/winter recreation visit to Glacier Park and the Flathead Valley.

Writers for SKIING, CHICAGO TRIBUNE, SKIERS NEWS, and other outlets visited Yellowstone Country Ski Areas.

Writers and editors from WORKING WOMAN, SNOW COUNTRY, and L.A.PARENT visited The Big Mountain and other Glacier Country ski areas.

Advertising Opportunities in 1998/99 MONTANA WINTER GUIDE

It is time to put the next edition of the MONTANA WINTER GUIDE together. In addition to information about Montana's winter recreation opportunities, the 1998-99 edition of the guide will provide some great advertising opportunities for Montanans involved in the state's winter recreation industry. Directory listings are priced at $190; one third page listings are $470; full page ads are also available. Space is allocated on a first come, first served basis. **The deadline for reserving space is April 24, 1998.** Contact Susan Albrecht at Travel Montana, 444-1617, for details. A minimum of 100,000 MONTANA WINTER GUIDES will be printed with distribution starting in August 1998.

Travel Montana Calendar

April

6-7	24th Annual Governor's Conference
16-19	L&C Interpretive Center Media Tour
24	RMI International Marketing Seminar, Cheyenne, WY

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